

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL LAWRENCE AVERY JR., U.S. AIR FORCE, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, SECURITY ASSISTANCE OFFICE, MULTINATIONAL SECURITY TRANSITION COMMAND-IRAQ, VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM BAGHDAD, IRAQ TIME: 10:00 A.M. EDT DATE: MONDAY, MARCH 16, 2009

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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG, (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Hello. I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Monday, March 16th, 2009. My name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg with the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating our call today.

A note to the bloggers on the line: Please clearly state your name and the organization you're with prior to answering your questions or -- giving your questions.

So let's go ahead and turn it over to U.S. Air Force Colonel Lawrence Avery Jr. He's the deputy director of the Security Assistance Office, MNSTC-I, Iraq, in Baghdad. Sir, I'm going to turn it over to you, if you'd like to start with an opening statement. Sir, the floor is yours. COL. AVERY: Okay. Thank you.

I've been asked today to talk about the Foreign Military Sales program, or FMS. And before I get started on how FMS is working here in Iraq, I wanted to make sure that we were kind of starting off on the same foot. So I wanted to talk a little bit about what FMS is.

The Foreign Military Sales program is a U.S. program for the sale of defense articles and services for countries that are authorized to receive them. That means authorized by the U.S. government. And it really is part of a normal security cooperation relationship between the United States and many other countries. Worldwide there are about 140 countries that use the FMS program, and they use it to buy military equipment, training, support, those sorts of things.

It's -- it really is just a choice for them. It's a choice for how they can procure items -- (off mike) -- U.S. acquisition system using our personnel, our policy, our procedures, and purchasing items under U.S. law. It really starts with a request from a country, that results in an international agreement called a Letter of Offer and Acceptance, that eventually will turn into what we call an FMS case. The buying country supplies the requirements and the funds, and then the U.S. actually procures the items for that country. It's -- it is -- it's a unique program. It's authorized by the Arms Export Control

Act, and it's actually done on a fee-for-service basis, so that the USFMS program pays for itself.

A little bit about FMS in Iraq is, the program's actually been used to train and equip Iraqi defense and interior forces. And it actually started in 2005, when the first FMS case was signed by Iraq. And from then until now, approximately \$4.5 billion -- that's Iraqi dollars -- have been spent on the cases that have been signed and implemented.

These cases include everything from food services cases to weapons, ammunition, body armor, data networks and cellphone networks, aircraft, boats for the navy and ground vehicles. It also includes contractor logistic support services for maintenance. And most recently, it includes the purchase of M1A1 tanks, C-130J airlift aircraft, and Bell 407 armed scout helicopters, as the Iraqi military prepares to modernize its forces.

I've been working the Iraq FMS program since about 2005, during that first case, from my assignment back at the Air Force Security Assistance Center at Wright-Patt., and have been here for about the last 15 months as the Air Force program chief and deputy director for the security assistance office.

And that completes my opening statement. I'd be happy to answer any questions, or try to answer any questions you may have.

LT. CRAGG: Great. Thank you, sir.

A note to the bloggers on the line, if you can, mute your phone when other people are talking, just to make sure we can hear everybody.

Let's go ahead and go with the first person on the line. That was Sharon. Please go ahead. Q Hi. This is Sharon Weinberger, with wired.com. I wanted to ask about two elements that you mentioned, ground and air. You mentioned the M1A1. There's also been, at least in the press, reports that an American company claimed that they had a lock on 2000 T-72 tanks that the Iraqis wanted, but this doesn't seem to have been staffed through the FMS process.

I was wondering if you could comment on that.

And also, there's a contract through FMS for 22 MI-17s, and I'm curious if any of those have been delivered yet of the current contract, which I believe is with ARINC.

COL. AVERY: Okay. First, on the T-72 tanks, we've been reading the same reports that everybody else has been reading. And those -- we don't know anything about it. The Iraqi government has denied reports of -- denied those reports as they've been in the press. And they're -- so they were not purchased through the FMS program. And I really don't know much more about it other than that.

Q Okay.

COL. AVERY: The MI-17 helicopters, no, none of those have been delivered yet. Those aircraft are in production, and we expect by the end of this year they should have the first aircraft on the ground.

Q Okay. Is there -- go on, sorry. I'll come back to my question. You can move on.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. I believe it was Staff Sergeant Randolph was the second one on the line. Do you want to go ahead with your question, Staff Sergeant?

Q No, ma'am, not yet.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, roger that. (Name inaudible) -- you're number three. Please go ahead.

Q Yeah. Colonel, I wonder if you could just talk a little bit about the prioritization of the military, the Iraqi military itself and kind of how much effort you're spending on preparing them for counterinsurgency and how much for kind of defense of the homeland, if you will. I mean, there's a -- we're having a debate in our own military about what -- how to weight the two. I'm just kind of curious how it's unfolding there.

COL. AVERY: Well, again, my specialty is more in the area of security assistance. I can tell you that there are other parts of the Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq that are more involved in the training, but I could tell you through the purchases, at least my view of what it is that's going on in that regard. Certainly, the immediate need was for counterinsurgency forces, not just for the military, but also for the police forces, the Ministry of Interior forces. And so for the most part, since the program began, we've mostly been helping them with -- to build counterinsurgency forces. And it wasn't until recently that they started looking at modernizing those forces into more of a strategic defense/defense-of-the-homeland kind of force. And these first three force modernization cases -- for the M-181 tanks, the armed scout helicopters and the C-130Js -- is really their first move in that direction toward strategic defense.

The -- I would say the -- you know, first we concentrated on equipping what I would call a very light infantry -- you know, basically a soldier with a -- with body armor, a helmet and a weapon, a Humvee and a radio. And that's pretty much what they've been doing on the ground side.

On the navy side, they've actually -- they bought a few small boats for, you know, protection of their sea lines of communication. And on the Air Force side they actually have some small aircraft that do intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance-type missions. And they are moving into the capability to actually fire weapons from the air. But those programs are ongoing. And they could be a help in the counterinsurgency fight.

(Inaudible) -- go ahead.

Q As far as the -- as far as the transportation for the light infantry, I mean, what are they -- are they taking our old Humvees primarily, or what are you buying for them?

COL. AVERY: Yes. They purchased some of their own Humvees, as well as they've been given a number of Humvees through the Iraqi Security Force fund program.

So as we -- you know, our Army moves into other vehicles, those vehicles become available and have been gifted in addition to the ones they've purchased. They buy a lot of -- they purchased a lot of trucks and SUVs, some of them armored and up-armored trucks.

Now, as far as eventually moving into, like, an infantry fighting vehicle, we do have a request from them -- we've actually had several requests that we're working through -- or they're working through their strategy as to which infantry fighting vehicle they're eventually going to buy.

We do know they're talking to other countries, which obviously as a sovereign nation they're allowed to do. So they're talking to other countries, but they have -- they have expressed interest in Stryker vehicles.

They've also expressed interest in the lightly armored vehicle that's used by the United States Marine Corps. And so we've actually -- are in the process of developing FMS cases for those, should they choose to go that direction.

Q Do you have any figures for how much we've gifted, if you will, how much we've given them of our equipment?

COL. AVERY: I'm really -- I'm probably not the best guy to answer that question, because I -- it's not on my scope of things that I do.

Q Okay.

COL. AVERY: So I definitely -- if I told you anything, I'd just be passing hearsay. I'm sorry. I probably should have had that number with me, but I don't.

Q No. Okay. Thank you.

COL. AVERY: All right.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Let's turn it over to Jarred. Jarred, please go ahead.

Q Thank you. Good afternoon, Colonel. Could we talk a little bit about -- you've had a lot of experience in this -- in the arena here. Aside from the actual hardware, could you talk about the process? Are there enough Iraqis in the ministries who are trained to know how to run the system? Are there enough controls to make sure it's being done correctly and money or equipment's not being pilfered? Just talk a little about those behind the scenes, about an actual functioning government.

COL. AVERY: Well, I can tell you that, from my perspective, the -- we -- I've been here for 15 months, and I see light-years of improvement in the short time that I've been here, in the ministerial capability and capacity to do things, to plan. They still have a long way to go. I mean, it's -- the -- you know, there's a lot of work that remains in that regard.

But they -- the Iraqis that I meet and work with every day over in the ministries -- because I actually, you know, spend a lot of time both in the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense, working with all of the services in the Ministry of Defense -- they're very serious about their jobs and very serious about their ability to purchase equipment, to organize, train and equip their forces.

And we have, you know, a large -- in fact, MNSTC-I, that's predominantly our mission -- is we have a large force of advisers and trainers

that are out in the ministries every day, trying to help them get better at planning, thinking through budget issues, thinking through equipage issues and how they want to organize their forces.

Anyway, so I think that -- I don't know if that hits all the points you wanted me to make.

Oh, you mentioned corruption. I would say that the -- first of all, one of the things that most of the Iraqis who are serious about, you know, building a capability in their country when it comes to equipping security forces like about the Foreign Military Sales program is the Foreign Military Sales program is -- they make a deposit and then basically tell us what the requirements are. And we use U.S. acquisition law, U.S. acquisition procedures to go out and secure that. So they view FMS as the anti-corruption mechanism for their government, because nobody can get their hands on the money, nobody decides who the contracts go to. That's all done through the U.S. acquisition system. And so they're very serious about using FMS as an anti-corruption measure.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Let's go back around the horn one more time. Sharon, please go ahead with any more questions.

Q Yeah, on that point, it seems like there's also a lot of frustration from Iraqi officials with some of the -- with some of the FMS sales, with the length of time. Just to take one example, there was at one prior date an FMS case for the BTR-3E1, the armored vehicle, the armored personnel carrier. What -- is that -- I know that sort of died on the vine. Has that been revived? Is there again an FMS case for that?

COL. AVERY: There is not. There is not a FMS case currently for BTR-3-echo-1. And that case did -- that case did not die on the vine.

I will tell you that -- and I have a fairly, you know, strongly held opinion about these things, so I'll share it with you, my view. The Foreign Military Sales program actually works best when countries, not just Iraq, any country that uses it, uses it to purchase the same items that we -- that we have. And, in fact, that's how it's used, for the most part. You know, countries want to buy something that the U.S. military is using, and they want us as the experts who use it, operate, maintain it, fix it, have a parts-supply chain for it, they -- and actually probably wrote the specification and know everything there is to know about it, including, you know, every contract that's ever been issued for the item. They want to purchase what we have.

So that -- FMS works -- I mean, one of the true advantages of FMS program is when you're -- you basically -- they're hiring us to do their procurement for them, because we're experts in those systems that we're procuring.

Now, that's not to say that we can't go out and procure other things, because we have, through the FMS program, procured items that we don't have, to include BTR-3-echo-1. We didn't -- we actually -- you know, we agreed to go out and buy those. There was a lot of discussion after that case was signed, and we all got a little bit smarter about BTR-3-echo-1s.

And the Iraqis made some changes in the requirements. They wanted different weapons on it and some other things. As we started pricing out that -- what that was going to look like and working with the country and the

companies, it turned out that it was going to be a lot higher price than the Iraqis originally thought it was going to be, and they decided to cancel that program.

What -- I mean, this goes to my earlier point about FMS works best when you buy and use what the U.S. military is buying and using, because, you know, if we give you a price on that, we're probably pretty good about it. If we're buying equipment from countries and companies that we've never worked with before, every problem that we run into is a new problem.

Now, on FMS being slow, I would say, you know, that case, BTR-3- echo-1, is an example of, you know, a very frustrating case for everybody. But for the most part, we're talking about, you know, \$4.5 billion worth of equipment that has been bought, of which, you know, 1.5 billion (dollars' worth) or so is already in the country, and the rest is on -- is, you know, some -- is just getting on contract, because some of those cases were actually just -- were actually just signed last year. But FMS has -- and U.S. procurement has done a very good job of getting equipment into Iraq.

Q Thank you.

COL. AVERY: Okay.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Let's turn it over to Staff Sergeant Randall (sp). Do you have a question, Staff Sergeant?

Q No, ma'am, I still don't. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, Roger that. Greg and Jared (sp), you end out the (round out ?) -- so if you want to go with any follow-up questions. Q Yeah. Colonel, a couple subjects. One, be curious to hear what the Iraqi military (desirements ?) are as far as armed helicopters -- helicopter gunships. Also, situational awareness: What kind of systems are they looking at? I mean, I'm sure they'd like to get their hands on some drones, although that's probably a little far off.

But what kind of -- where are they in the whole situational awareness area?

COL. AVERY: Okay, well, I'll answer the second part first. Situational awareness, I assume you mean some type of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability to surveil the battle stations? Is that what you're talking about?

Q Yeah. Yeah.

COL. AVERY: Okay.

Q Or even an ability to tap into kind of our assets, if you will.

COL. AVERY: Okay. All right. Well, they actually have their own -- their own capability, that they purchased. In fact, the second FMS case in Iraq was for King Air aircraft, King Air 350s, one of those being the light transport aircraft and the other five being ISR platforms -- would have a ISR package onboard, in terms of sensors, and some stations onboard to work those sensors. And they actually connect -- they have datalinks to connect the ground stations. And so the -- they have those aircraft.

They also have some Cessna 208 aircraft equipped with an ISR package. They have some aircraft they call "See Through," that were gifted from another country, I'm not sure which one. And then they have CH-2000s, which is a small, light aircraft with a camera pod on the bottom, that they use.

So they do have battlefield situational awareness platforms of their own. And then obviously, as they -- you know, as our forces are here and have UAVs and other capabilities, and to the extent that those forces are deployed with Iraqi forces, they have the ability to tie into and use that. So they do have a -- I consider a fairly solid plan that they use.

Q Is that -- are those networked assets?

COL. AVERY: They use ISR assets.

Q I'm sorry. Are those networked assets at this point? I mean, are they getting live feed from these aircraft, do you know? COL. AVERY: They are getting live feeds to their ground stations, and they -- so it's really in the placement of the ground stations that -- you know, in terms of where exactly the data is.

We've done some demonstrations recently of where those ground stations could be moved to, and possibly in the future networking them a little bit better into more of a nationwide command and control mode. But that's -- that's a work in progress. So they do have some capability to do that.

Q And so that was -- how many aircraft, roughly, was that that you listed there? Was it about two dozen? Is that --

COL. AVERY: Well, it's five King Airs, five Cessnas, eight Sama CH2000s. I don't know how many (Seekers ?) they have, so.

Q Got it. And then on helicopter gunships?

COL. AVERY: Helicopter gunships -- they are in the process of purchasing Bell -- in -- Bell 407 armed scout, which'll be a lightly armed -- lightly armed helicopter. The first deliveries will be in a couple of years from now. And they purchased 24 of those, and they have a request in, as they evaluate their budget, for potentially buying 26 more, for a total of 50. So that's what they're -- that's what they're in the process of buying.

They have Mi-17s that they already own. They have Mi-17s -- the 22 that were talked about earlier that are (in bounds/inbound ?) that -- they're looking at options for maybe arming some of those. So as far as, you know, what all their desirements are, I can't really speak to that. I do know they are -- the armed capabilities, I know their purchasing for helicopters is through the Bell 407 armed scout program.

Q All right. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Jared, over to you. Last and final question, if you have any.

Q Yes, ma'am.

Thank you, sir, for your time. My question would be, stepping back from your job, just (with ?) the FMS growth, what's your experience -- has been in the 15 months -- as I'm sure you spend a lot of your time in the Green Zone and in the ministries, but obviously you see what's going on in Baghdad. What's the feel there? What's been changing in the last few months? Where do you see more need for improvement, and what's your overall thoughts?

COL. AVERY: Well, I would say, you know, that Baghdad, at least the part of Baghdad that I see, you know -- and I'm still in, you know, the international zone -- is still, you know, fairly well walled -- you know, T-walls. But I'm starting to see some of those T-walls come down. We're starting to see more people -- more people, you know, walking around, kids on bicycles, those kinds of things, that, you know, you don't -- it's not real common, but you see it and you notice it.

So, you know, in general, I would say, you know, from the time I got here to now, there's -- you know, there's been a slight -- a slight change to the positive.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Well, I believe that's all the questions for today, sir. I'm going to turn it, actually, back over to you, Colonel Avery, if you'd like to end with perhaps a closing statement or any closing thoughts.

COL. AVERY: Well, I appreciate everybody's time, as well. The Security Assistance Office here in Iraq, there's about 50 personnel. It was about 10 when I first got here, and so in 15 months it's grown in size.

The FMS program has grown in size, as well. You know, when I -- over the last -- I talked about the \$4.5 billion worth of programs. Close to 3 billion (dollars) of that has been -- are cases that were assigned within the last 15 months or so since I've been here. And so, while when I first got here there were a lot of complaints similar to the one that was brought up about the BTR-3 Echoes, those complaints seem to have subsided. And quite frankly, were there not some, you know, budget issues with the oil prices and those kinds of things that were going on right now, I think that we would be -- we would have moved even further ahead in terms of using the FMS program to equip the Iraqis.

And like I said, you know, earlier, FMS is a choice that countries have. They obviously can procure things through direct contracts, they can go to other countries, and they can use the U.S. FMS program. And I think the confidence that I've seen in both the ministry of the interior and the ministry of defense at the minister's level, the confidence in the FMS program being able to deliver for them, has grown. And that's why we've seen such an increase in the amount of items that they've purchased through FMS.

I will also say that, you know, doing FMS in a wartime environment while the fight's ongoing has been probably a unique challenge for the security assistance professionals back in the States that write these FMS cases, the acquisition professionals who go out and procure the equipment. And they've done a fantastic job, from where we sit, in helping us help the Iraqis.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. And just a note to everybody on the line: Today's program will be available online on DefenseLink, under the bloggers' link on DefenseLink, as well as -- (inaudible) -- today's call and the transcript and the audio file.



Again, sir, thank you for joining us today on DOD LIVE Bloggers Roundtable. COL. AVERY: You're welcome. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: This concludes today's event. Thank you.

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